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Man on a mission



ABOVE: The Rev. Jesse Jackson acknowledges a standing ovation Sunday at Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church, where he spoke to about 1,000 people to call for a renewed national effort to end poverty. He decried spending on the war in Iraq as domestic programs struggle for funding. **BELOW:** Alonna Trotter, 14, of the Purpose Center Dancers performs in honor of Jackson's visit. Jackson is a longtime leader in the civil-rights movement and a former presidential candidate.



1,000 hear Jackson speak in SB church

By Robert Rogers
Staff Writer

SAN BERNARDINO — The Rev. Jesse Jackson described San Bernardino's struggles with crime and economic decay as an "American story" that cries out for a renewed nationwide effort to combat poverty.

Jackson, one of the nation's most recognizable civil-rights leaders, spoke with characteristic fire to about 1,000 people packed into the movie-theater-turned-worship-halls of Mount Zion Baptist Church on Sunday.

In his speech, heard by local and fed-

eral leaders, including Rep. Joe Baca, D-Rialto, Jackson wove an array of issues, including the Iraq war, immigration, the Voting Rights Act, prison systems and economic outsourcing into a knot of indictments of the nation's direction.

"If we can rescue Iraqis and Afghans," said Jackson in reference to U.S. military operations in those two countries, "we can rescue and bail out the people of San Bernardino."

Jackson cited numerous incarceration and recidivism statistics germane to the city and county. But he did not directly

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— The Rev. JESSE JACKSON

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The Rev. Jesse Jackson, left, greets Rep. Joe Baca, D-Rialto, before speaking at Mount Zion Baptist Church on Sunday. Jackson criticized the war in Iraq and the country's spending priorities, saying, "We fund first-class prisons and second-class schools."

"(We are) choosing incarceration over education ... recidivism over rehabilitation."

The Rev. JESSE JACKSON

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address Measure Z, a voter-approved tax-like the first proceeds of which the City Council recently opted to spend solely on the Police Department.

But Jackson repeatedly made clear his umbrage with what he called dealing with crime and other "symptoms" of urban decay on the "back end" with beefed-up police forces and prison construction, rather than on the "front end" with a broad preventive strategy.

"We must consider a war on poverty, to wipe out poverty, not wipe out the people," Jackson said to a throng of reporters in a prespeech conference. "Early intervention in education, job training and drug rehabilitation must be invested (in)," he said.

Jackson addressed a crowd of about 300 in the church's main worship hall, while live video feeds of the former presidential candidate streamed into other converted movie theaters jammed with people. Mount Zion's lead pastor, the Rev. T. Elliott, moved his congregation from the Westside to the vacant facility a few years ago.

In his address, Jackson employed the customary rhythmic, repetitious and refrain-driven oratory at which he has excelled since his days alongside Martin Luther King Jr. in the civil-rights movement of the 1960s. Beginning with a subdued, almost meditative delivery, the bespectacled Jackson had the crowd whipped into a standing, swaying crescendo by the end of his nearly hourlong address.

Jackson was particularly caustic in his denunciations of the criminal-justice system. Calling prisons "jail hotels," he repeatedly asserted that correctional facilities profited from maintaining high occupancy and were the beneficiaries of high recidivism rates among parolees, in effect encouraging a nonexistent strategy for rehabilitation.

"We fund first-class prisons and second-class schools," Jackson said.

Owing to Jackson's national stature and some safety concerns related to the building's history, city police coordinated traffic on Del Rosa Avenue while nine fire personnel monitored the crowd inside the church.

Police and fire officials reported no problems.

Jackson also touched on simmering "black and brown" racial tensions in Southern California, where school brawls between black and Latino students have grown frequent.

On Saturday, one day before Jackson's arrival, about 300 people marched to City Hall with a triple agenda: legalization of illegal immigrants, an end to the Iraq war and a cessation of violence on local streets.

Although Jackson did not specifically mention that protest, he shared its themes.

Jackson hit hard at the war, saying the Bush adminis-



Gabriel Luis Acosta/Staff Photographer

Judy Knox sways in front of her seat before the Rev. Jesse Jackson's speech at Mount Zion Baptist Church on Sunday.

tration "engineered" and "misled" the public with pretexts for the invasion and linking it to disinvestment in domestic programs.

"We are spending more on 20 million Iraqis than we are on all Americans," Jackson said, citing the cost of the war as \$10 billion per month.

"End the war in Iraq, and end poverty at home."

Jackson was unyielding in his criticism of the nation's domestic direction, the consequences of which he said are felt across the country.

"(We are) choosing incarceration over education ... recidivism over rehabilitation," Jackson said.

Jackson blasted President Bush for failing to utter a word about the devastation wrought by Hurricane Katrina in his latest State of the Union address, calling the omission a "metaphor for abandoned, neglected urban America."

Jackson's overarching themes were engaging in a new "war on poverty" — a phrase first coined by President Lyndon Johnson in the 1960s — and civic engagement starting at the ballot box.

Jackson urged the audience — blacks, Latinos and poor Americans in particular — to do their part in steering the nation in a new direction.

"The struggle for civil rights is not over," he said.

A handful of government and religious leaders gathered in a post-service reception at the church.

Councilman Rikke Van Johnson said Jackson's speech strengthened his commitment to push funding for crime intervention and prevention programs.

"I have no choice," he said. "It's the right thing to do."

Jackson and Rainbow/PUSH Coalition officials are scheduled today to visit Good Samaritan Hospital Los Angeles and the Twin Towers Correctional Facility.

Contact writer Robert Rogers at (909) 385-3655 or via e-mail at robert.rogers@sbsun.com.